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Mr. Chairman, Honorable

Members, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning about the recommendations of the Commission on Federal Election Reform, which was co-chaired by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker, III and was organized by the Center for Democracy and Election Management at American University.

The Carter-Baker Commission's recommendations aim to bridge the gap between Republicans and Democrats on critical issues of election reform, including voter identification requirements, and to forge consensus on ways to improve U.S. elections. Rather than seek consensus at the lowest common denominator, the Commission recognized that the primary concerns of each party were valid, and it put forward a bold package of proposals to address both sets of concerns.

The Carter-Baker Commission issued its report last September with 87 specific recommendations to build confidence in U.S. election systems. Polls taken around the time of the November 2004 elections indicated that about a third of Americans had doubts about the accuracy of the vote. The Commission's recommendations aim to bolster confidence both by improving ballot integrity and by expanding access to elections.

Voter identification ensures that each voter who arrives at the polls is the same person named on the registration list. About 40 million Americans move each year, and many urban residents do not know the people living in their own apartment building, let alone in their precinct. Some form of voter ID therefore is needed to check that voters are who they say.

While the available evidence of fraud does not indicate that it is extensive, there is no doubt that fraud occurs, and it could affect the outcome of a close election. The electoral system cannot inspire public confidence if no safeguards are in place to detect or deter fraud or to confirm the identity of voters.

The use of photo ID cards in today's society has become common. Photo IDs currently are needed to board a plane, to enter a federal building, and to cash a check. The security of the vote is equally important.

Voter ID requirements have proliferated in recent years. The number of states that require some form of voter ID has increased from 11 in 2001 to 25 today. Some states require photo ID, while others accept utility bills, affidavits, or other documents. In addition, 11 other states have considered bills to introduce or strengthen voter ID requirements.

Rather than allow disparate ID requirements to proliferate, and raise the risk that they might be applied in a discriminatory manner, the Carter-Baker Commission proposed a uniform system of voter ID. This system is designed both to enhance ballot security and to increase voter participation.

The Carter-Baker Commission recommends a national standard for voter ID based on the REAL ID card. As you know, the REAL ID Act requires states to verify each individual's full legal name, date of birth, address, Social Security number, and U.S. citizenship before the individual is issued a driver's license or personal ID card. Individuals who receive a REAL ID card thus prove that they are also eligible to vote. Moreover, the National Voter Registration Act (known as "Motor Voter") has already linked voter registration to the process of obtaining a driver's license.

The use of REAL ID cards for voting purposes would allow a driver's license to double as a voting card. The only change needed would be to make a small notation on the front or back of the card to indicate whether the card-holder is a U.S. citizen.

Some have expressed concern that photo ID requirements are intended or will have the effect of disenfranchising voters. The Carter-Baker Commission shared this concern and thus developed proposals to expand voter participation. First of all, the proposals tie the photo ID directly to voter registration. Citizens who are issued REAL ID cards would be automatically registered to vote. Thus, if there is any problem with the registration of voters when they turn up at the polls, their ID card would provide proof of their eligibility to vote.

An estimated 88 percent of Americans have a driver's license, while only 72 percent of the voting aged population (according to the U.S. Census Bureau) or 86 percent of adult citizens (according to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's Election Day Survey) are registered to vote. Implementation of the Carter-Baker Commission's recommendations therefore will increase the number of registered voters. But that is not enough.

The Commission is concerned about the 12 percent of Americans who do not have a driver's license. A photo ID requirement may create a barrier to

voting unless it is combined with affirmative measures by states to make voter IDs accessible and available to all eligible citizens. The Carter-Baker Commission recommends that anyone who does not have a driver's license should be able to get a photo ID card free of charge.

The Commission also calls on states to take the initiative in reaching out to citizens both to register voters and to provide non-drivers with free ID cards. States should do so by deploying mobile offices, like the one used in Michigan, opening new offices, and using social service agencies to register voters and to issue IDs. The Carter-Baker Commission's proposals thereby should significantly expand the number of citizens who are both registered to vote and issued a photo ID card.

Under the Carter-Baker Commission's proposed system of voter registration and ID, states would be able to easily identify and locate registered voters who do not have ID cards. In addition, the proposed mobile offices would reach out to citizens who neither are registered nor have a driver's license and thus would bring new participants into the electoral process.

One additional safeguard is critical to prevent photo ID requirements from depressing voter participation: The Carter-Baker Commission recommends that voters without a photo ID should be able to cast provisional ballots.

Until 2010, their votes would count if the signature they placed on the ballot matched the one on file with the election office. After 2010, people who forget their photo IDs could cast provisional votes that would be counted if they returned with their ID within 48 hours.

The overall point of the Commission's recommendations is that a mandatory photo ID will raise confidence in the electoral system and an affirmative program to expand voter registration and access to IDs will increase participation in elections. The combination of uniform photo ID requirements and expanded voter registration with free IDs sets the Carter-Baker Commission's recommendations apart from other proposals on voter ID.

Voter ID requirements remain controversial. In several states that considered new voter ID requirements, state legislatures split almost entirely along party lines. The Carter-Baker Commission recommendations, by contrast, offer a way to bridge the partisan divide.

The Commission's bipartisan plan combines constructive proposals from both major parties to modernize our nation's electoral systems. This plan defines a solid basis for consensus on the complex and sometimes contentious issues of election reform, including of voter ID requirements. By finding common ground, we can move towards an electoral system that simultaneously improves ballot access and election integrity and thereby gives confidence to

all Americans.